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(56) Documents Cited

US 4424865 A

US 2723721 A

US 2305282 A

(58) Field of Search

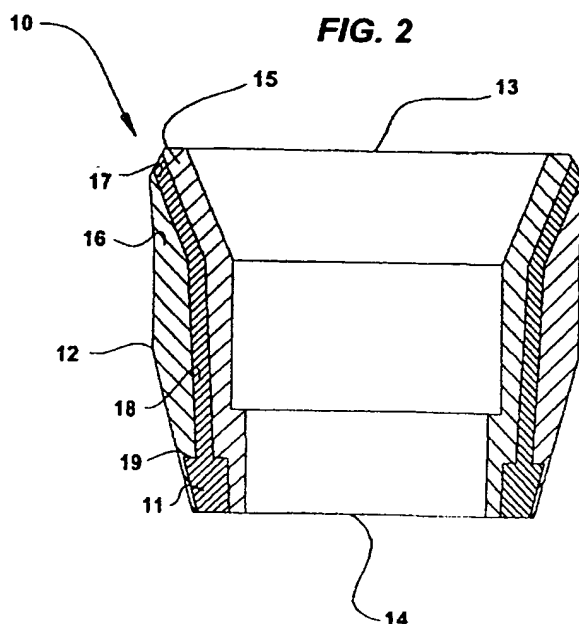
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(54) Abstract Title

Packer cup

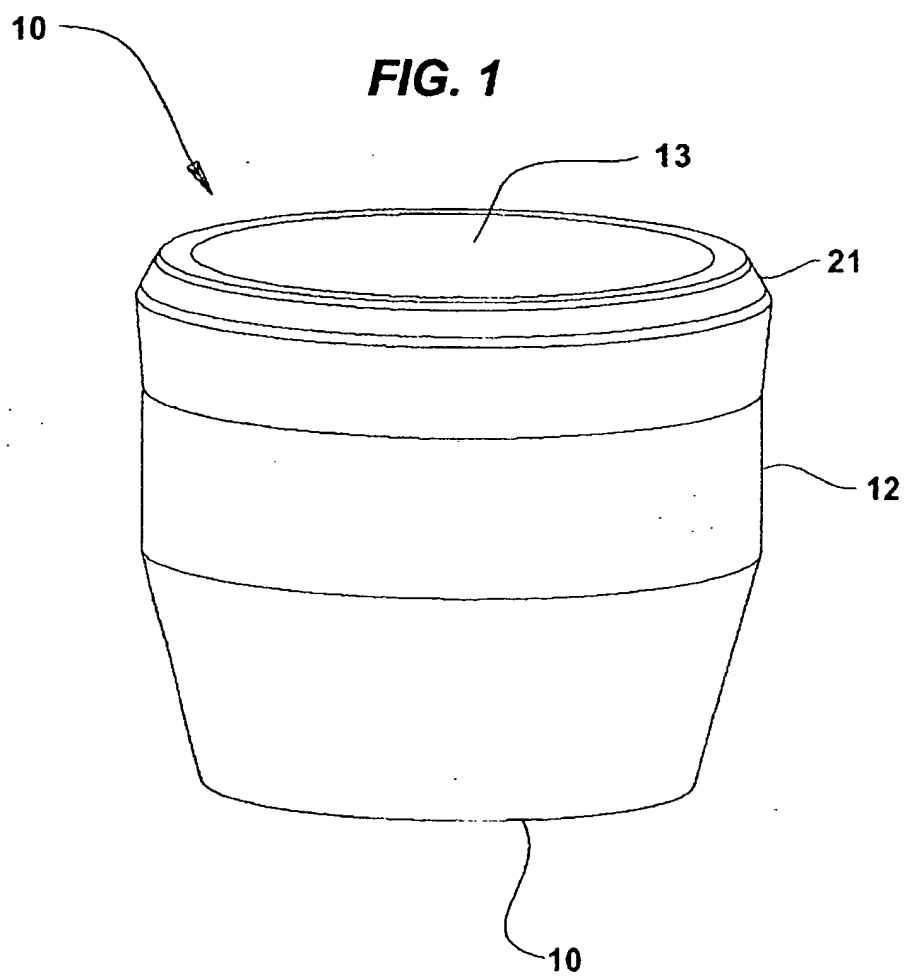
(57) A packer cup 10 for isolating a high pressure zone from a lower pressure zone comprises a base ring 11 from which an annular body 12 extends. An intermediate section 17 formed from interwoven high strength reinforcing plies 18, such as wires or cables, is attached to the base ring 11. The packer cup 10 comprises an inner and outer layer 15, 16 bonded onto either side of the intermediate section 17. The inner and outer layers 15, 16 are formed from an elastomeric or rubber material to form a unitary and flexible structure. The intermediate layer 17 acts as a continuous, but flexible reinforcement to allow the expansion and contraction of the packer cup 10. The intermediate section 17 further prevents the inner and outer elastomeric layers 15, 16 from extruding whilst under pressure.

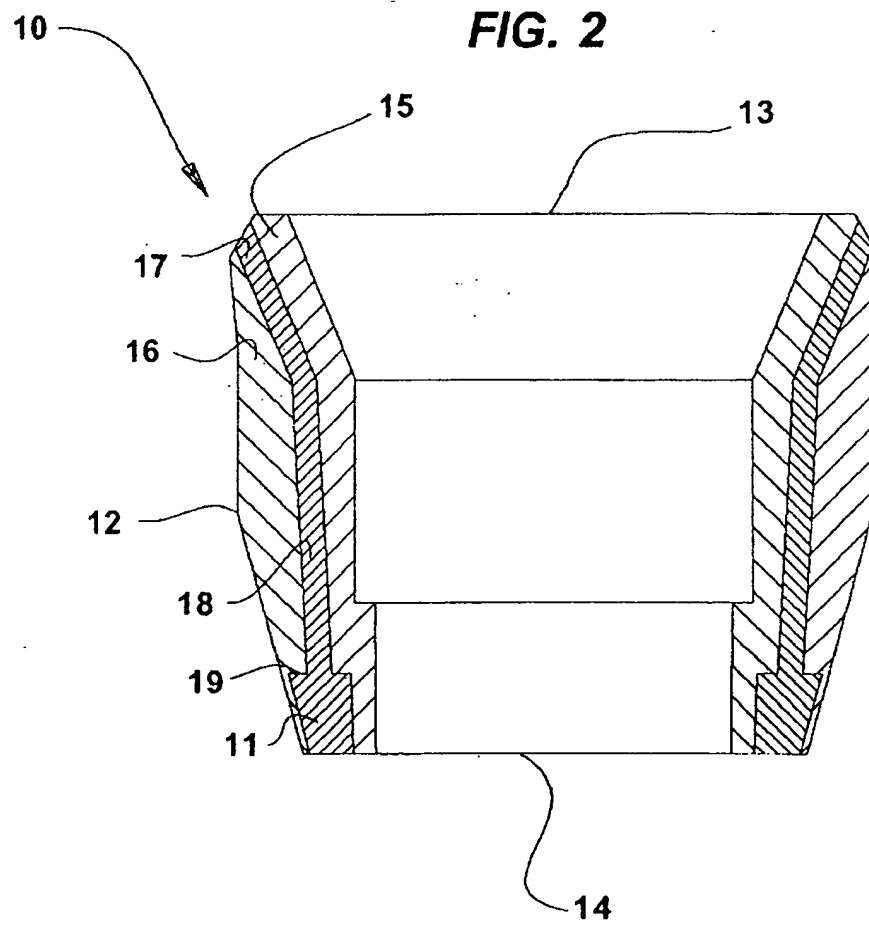


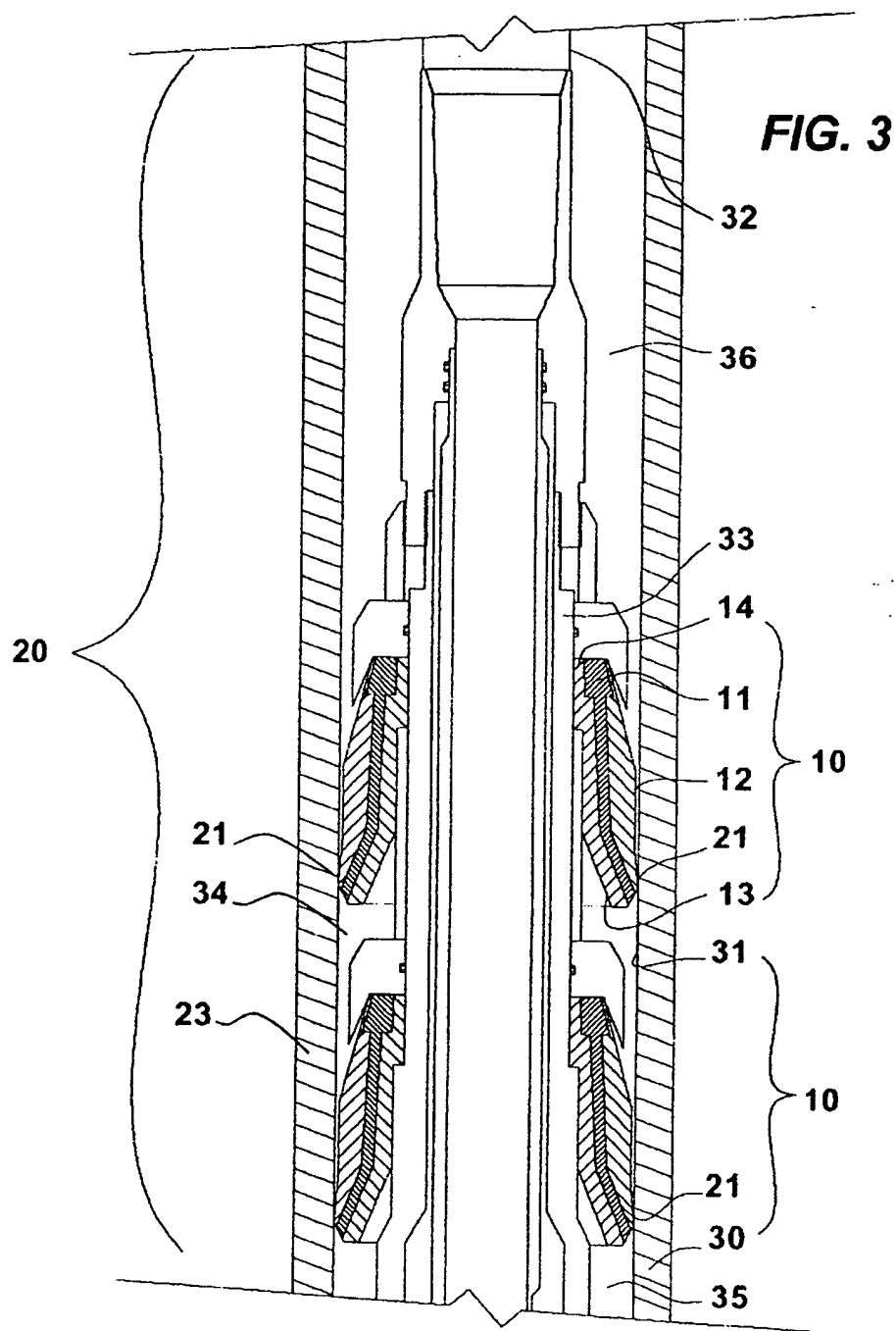
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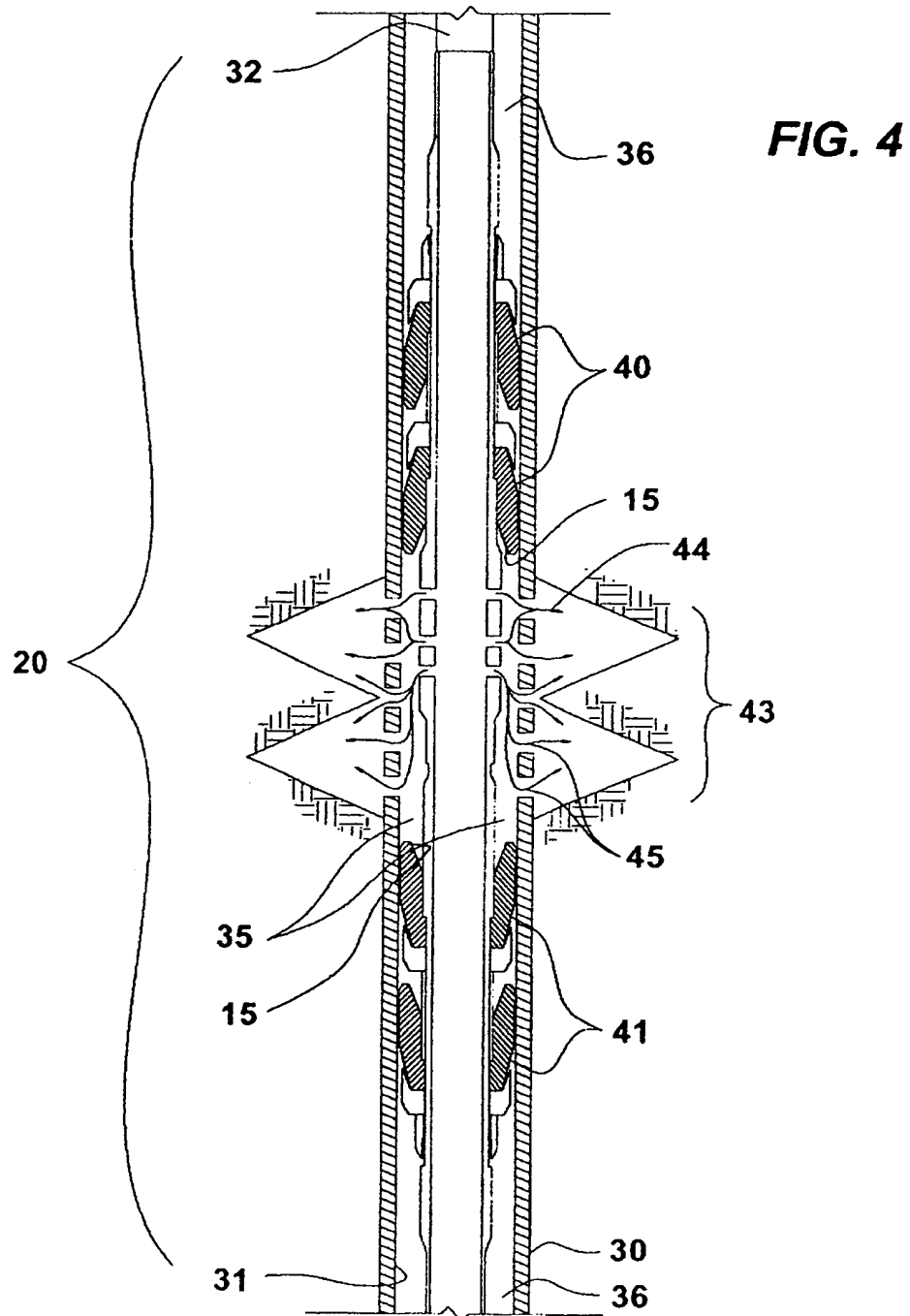
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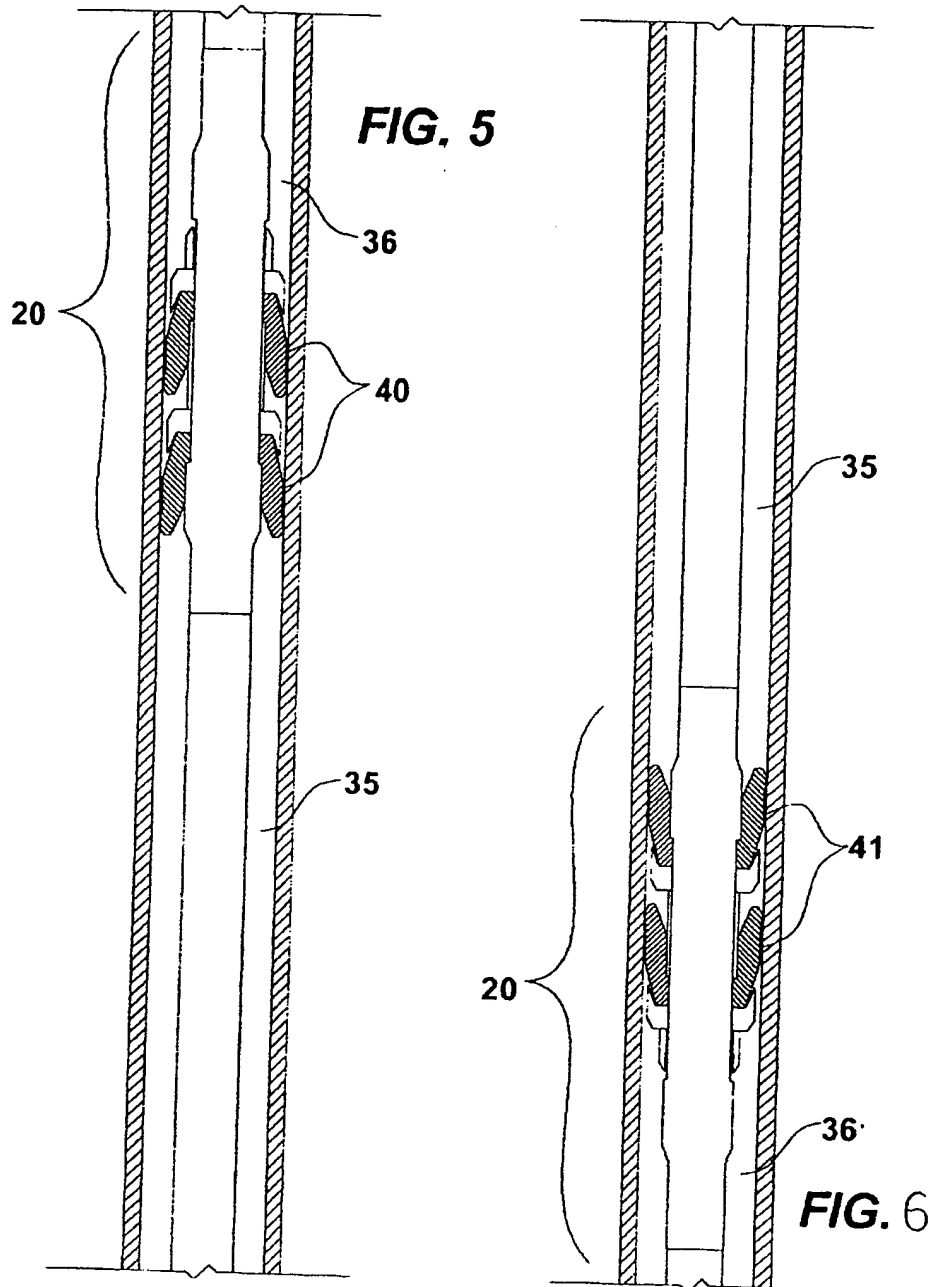
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1 "COMPOSITE PACKER CUP"

2
3 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

4 The present invention relates to packer cups and more specifically
5 to packer cups used as seals in packer cup assemblies acting to isolate zones
6 within a formation by sealing a portion of the wellbore.

7
8 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

9 Packer cups are known for use in hook wall packers and other
10 assemblies designed to isolate zones within a wellbore or to separate high and
11 low pressure zones within a wellbore. Typically, this type of operation is
12 performed for reservoir stimulations such as to stimulate a delimited portion of the
13 well with the introduction of acidic solutions to enhance reservoir flow. Often the
14 acidic solutions will further contain solvents, surfactants and anti-foaming agents
15 all designed to aid in leaching substances, such as calcium carbonate and
16 asphaltenes from the formation, resulting in the opening of pores to increase
17 production. These constituents, dissolved in the highly acidic solution challenge
18 the materials of construction of the assemblies, particularly the packer cups.

19 Historically, to access a zone in a wellbore, it was necessary to first
20 "kill" the well by pumping a fluid into the well until sufficient hydrostatic pressure
21 was obtained to overcome the pressure of the formation and prevent fluids from
22 being blown out of the well. The wellhead was removed and the necessary
23 treating apparatus tied into the production tubing. Following treatment the well
24 was swabbed to re-instate production.

1 A number of assemblies have been designed to replace the
2 historical process of killing the well, accessing and treating the well and swabbing
3 to reinstate production. US Patent 3,380,304 to Cummins describes one of the
4 earliest assemblies wherein a hollow high pressure mandrel, slidingly engaged
5 within a high pressure casing was provided. The casing was adapted to seal
6 against the wellhead and the mandrel adapted to seal to the top of the production
7 tubing below the wellhead. Thus, the mandrel could be extended or retracted and
8 fluids provided to the formation, all the while protecting the wellhead from high
9 pressure. Seal means, between the outer surface of the mandrel and the interior
10 of the production tubing, were required to pump sand-laden fracturing fluids out
11 through the assembly described.

12 Mechanical packers and inflatable packers are known which can be
13 positioned in a well and actuated to seal a zone in a wellbore. Other assemblies,
14 such as hook wall, or cup-type packers are also known are inserted into the
15 wellbore in their actuated state.

16 The cup-type packers are inexpensive compared to inflatable or
17 mechanically actuated packers. The cup-type packers use elastomeric sealing
18 cups fabricated from elastomeric materials having metal reinforcing fingers
19 embedded in the elastomer. The cup is mounted on a pipe or mandrel for
20 insertion into the well. To effect a downhole wellbore seal, the cups are generally
21 oversized compared to the inner diameter of the well casing so as to bear against
22 the casing wall. The contact of the seal, against the casing, is further enhanced
23 by the resultant force of differential pressure across the seal. Typically, as
24 described in US Patent 4,424,865 to Payton Jr., the reinforcing metal elements
25 are fabricated as fingers which extend upwardly into the elastomeric body from a

1 metal base plate. The fingers expand radially outward, rotating from the metal
2 base as a result of increases in temperature and pressure, forcing the cup into
3 engagement with the casing side wall.

4 Conventional packer cups have a number of shortcomings. Firstly,
5 as the cups are always "actuated" and in contact with the wellbore, the exterior of
6 the cup is subjected to sustained mechanical abrasion against the casing side
7 wall during insertion and removal from the wellbore. Typically, installation
8 requires travel through a long bore which can result in removal of the exterior
9 portion of the elastomer to the point where the seal is compromised.

10 Secondly, packer cups are fabricated from synthetic rubber
11 materials that have limited mechanical properties under elevated temperature
12 and that are susceptible to repeated exposure to aggressive wellbore fluids.
13 Further, the interior of the packer cup is subjected to highly acidic, organo-solvent
14 based wellbore fracturing fluids which are highly corrosive and also destructive to
15 most synthetic rubbers, eventually resulting in a breach of the elastomeric
16 material, often failing due to extrusion of the elastomer through in the spaces
17 between the reinforcing elements.

18 Conventional packer cups are a compromise between chemical
19 resistance, mechanical abrasion resistance and structural properties.

20

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

1
2 The packer cup of the present invention comprises, in a broad
3 aspect, an inner chemically impervious elastomeric layer, an outer abrasion
4 resistant elastomeric layer and an internal interwoven fiber-reinforced flexible
5 layer, preferably metal. All three layers are formed into a unitary composite
6 packer cup capable of withstanding repeated mechanical insertion and removal
7 from the wellbore casing as well as exposure to harsh wellbore fluids. Further,
8 the composite inner layer provides additional reinforcement throughout the entire
9 cup structure, for strength to resist extrusion and withstand elevated pressures
10 and temperature commonly found downhole.

11 Preferably the chemically impervious inner layer is Viton™ and the
12 outer abrasion resistant layer is Nitrile™. The inner layer is an interwoven mesh
13 of high strength fibers such as aircraft cable attached to an annular base ring.
14 The cup has a body formed of the three layers which is shaped to flare upwardly
15 and outwardly from the base ring and has an annular flange extending outwardly
16 from the body adjacent an open first end for engaging the casing.

17 When the layers are bonded, preferably by vulcanizing, into a
18 unitary structure, the cup can be used in a packer assembly for isolating a zone
19 of high pressure containing harsh chemicals. The base ring is sealing engaged
20 with a mandrel for threading into production tubing and the annular flange
21 extends outwardly into an annulus formed between the production tubing and the
22 casing for sealing engaging the casing. The open first end is oriented to face
23 towards the zone of higher pressure so that the differential pressure across the
24 cup can act to further seal the cup against the casing.

1 A plurality of cups may be used in each packer assembly, the cups
2 being oriented to isolate the zone of interest. For isolating zones intermediate
3 ends of the production tubing, the cups may be positioned uphole and downhole,
4 with open ends facing or for other purposes such as isolating the wellhead from
5 high pressure or cleaning perforations at the downhole end of a production string
6 they may all be oriented uphole or downhole as the case may be.

7

8 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

9 Figure 1 is a perspective view of a packer cup of the present
10 invention;

11 Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view of a packer cup according to Fig.
12 1, showing the inner and outer elastomeric layers surrounding an intermediate
13 interwoven, flexible fiber reinforcing layer;

14 Figure 3 is cross-sectional view of packer cups of the present
15 invention installed in a packer assembly, the annular lip of the cup sealingly
16 engaging the casing wall and the base ring sealingly engaging the tubing string;

17 Figure 4 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a packer assembly
18 of Figure 3, having packer cups isolating a zone of high pressure intermediate the
19 production tubing;

20 Figure 5 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a packer assembly
21 having packer cups isolating a downhole zone of high pressure; and

22 Figure 6 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a packer assembly
23 having packer cups isolating an uphole zone of high pressure.

24

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Having reference to Figs. 1 and 2, a packer cup 10 of the present invention is shown. The packer cup 10 comprises a base ring 11 from which an annular body 12 extends and which enables mounting of the cup to a tool or assembly 20 (Figs. 3-6). The cup body 12 has an open first end 13 having an annular lip 21 and which has a radial extent which is larger in diameter than the open second end 14. The second end 14 is attached to the base ring 11. Typically, the radial extent of the open first end 13 is slightly larger in diameter than an inner diameter of a wellbore casing string 30 into which the packer cup 10 is to be placed. As shown in Fig. 3, the smaller open second end 14 is sized to snugly fit the base ring 11, which is fit into a packer cup assembly 20 for insertion into a production tubing string 32.

As shown in Fig. 2, the packer cup 10 comprises three layers, an inner layer 15, an outer layer 16 and an intermediate layer 17, disposed therebetween. The three layers 15, 16, 17 are bonded together, such as by vulcanizing, to form the unitary packer cup body 12.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the inner and outer layers 15,16 are fabricated from elastomers which are specifically selected for the contrary environments.

The inner layer 15 is an elastomer. There are many elastomers which may be selected for chemical and temperature resistance.. Viton™ is such a chemically impervious synthetic elastomer. Viton™ is typically impervious to the corrosive nature of the wellbore fluids used in stimulation and fracturing. However, by comparison to other elastomers, Viton™ is relatively mechanically weak and not particularly resistant to abrasion.

1 The outer layer 16 is fabricated from a mechanically strong and
2 tough elastomer. There are many elastomers which may be selected to
3 toughness and temperature resistance. Once such elastomer is a synthetic such
4 as Nitrile™. Nitrile™, which is relatively impervious to hydrocarbons and very
5 mechanically strong such as for resisting abrasion. Nitrile™ does not have the
6 chemical resistant properties of Viton™.

7 As shown in Fig. 2, the intermediate layer 17 comprises a mesh of
8 biased or helical, interwoven high strength reinforcing plies 18, such as wire or
9 more preferably aircraft cable, attached at a lower end 19 to the base ring 11.
10 The mesh 18, is typically a helically wound assembly so that the cup's annular
11 body can flex radially and expand and contract slightly with the inner and outer
12 15, 16 elastomeric layers. The plies 18 provide a substantially continuous
13 structural reinforcement throughout a substantial portion of the body 12 of the
14 packer cup 10. Examples of the manufacture and use of such mesh is known to
15 persons in the art of inflatable packers. It is known to vary the thickness and
16 number of cables, and helical build angle to affect their flexibility. Opposing
17 helical winds of cable plies result in a criss-cross pattern which assists in avoiding
18 extrusion of the inner layer 15 therethrough. An example of the selection of some
19 of these parameters is set forth in inflatable packer US Patent 5,778,982 the
20 entirety of which is incorporated herein.

21 In a preferred method of fabrication, the intermediate layer 17 is first
22 attached to the base ring 11 such as by brazing and then is embedded within the
23 inner 15 and outer layers 16. The packer cup 10, so assembled, is then
24 vulcanized to bond the layers 15,16,17 into a unitary structure, capable of

1 withstanding differential wellbore pressures across the cup, which can in the
2 range of 15,000 psi or greater without suffering extrusion failure.

3 Having reference again to Figs. 2 and 3, the cup's body 12 has an
4 annular lip 21 formed adjacent the first open end 13 for engaging the inner wall
5 31 of the casing string 30. Further, the body 12 is tapered at the second end 14,
6 about the annular ring 11 to allow insertion into the packer assembly 20.

7 As shown in Figs. 3 - 6, packer cups 10 are mounted to packer
8 assemblies 20 having a mandrel 33 for threading into or otherwise suitably
9 connection to a production tubing string 32, which is lowered into the wellbore
10 casing string 30. The annular ring 11 of the cup 10 is sealingly engaged against
11 the mandrel 33 while the annular lip 21 protrudes radially outward therefrom into
12 an annulus 34 formed between the mandrel 33 and the casing 30. The protruding
13 lips 21 of the packer assemblies 20 are squeezed into the casing 30
14 mechanically, by an insertion and rotation of the production tubing 32. Once in
15 position, the annular lips 21 seal against the inner wall 31 of the casing string 30.

16 The cups 10 are preferably oriented having the first open end 13
17 directed toward a zone of higher pressure 35 and away from a zone of lower
18 pressure 36 so that the differential pressure across the cup 10 further acts to
19 drive the annular lip 21 of the cup 10 to seal against the inner wall 31 of the
20 casing 30.

21 Fig. 4 illustrates one embodiment of a packer assembly 20 having
22 uphole and downhole packer cups 40, 41 which act to isolate an intermediate
23 zone of higher pressure 35 between the cups 40,41. This configuration of packer
24 assembly 20 is typically used in high pressure acid stimulation of delimited
25 portions of the formation 43 and is used to penetrate through a plurality of

1 wellbore casing perforations 45 to dissolve blockages and increase reservoir
2 flow. In such an embodiment, the outer layer 16 of the cups 40,41 is subjected to
3 abrasion during insertion while the inner layer 15 of each cup 40,41 is exposed to
4 corrosive stimulation fluids 44.

5 Similarly, Figs 5 and 6 illustrate alternate and simple embodiments
6 of assemblies employing the invention, each utilizing a single set of packer cups
7 10 in a packer assembly 20 for isolating a downhole or uphole zone of higher
8 pressure, respectively.

1 THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN
2 EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS
3 FOLLOWS:
4

5 1. An improved packer cup comprising:

6 an annular base ring for mounting to a packer assembly which is
7 positioned in a wellbore casing to isolate a higher pressure zone from a lower
8 pressure zone;

9 an annular cup extending from the annular base ring toward the
10 higher pressure zone and having

11 an elastomeric inner layer, and

12 an elastomeric outer layer; and

13 an annularly extending flexible intermediate layer of reinforcing plies
14 of material disposed between the inner and outer layers, and mounted at a lower
15 end to the base ring, the inner, outer and intermediate layers being bonded
16 together to form a unitary, flexible structure.

17
18 2. The improved packer cup as described in claim 1 wherein
19 the inner elastomeric layer is fabricated from a chemically impervious elastomer.

20
21 3. The improved packer cup as described in claim 2 wherein
22 the chemically impervious elastomer is Viton™.

23
24 4. The packer cup as described in claim 1 wherein the outer
25 layer is fabricated from an abrasion resistant elastomer.

-
- 1 5. The packer cup as described in claim 4 wherein the abrasion
2 resistant elastomer is Nitrile™.
- 3
- 4 6. The packer cup as described in claim 1 wherein the inner
5 layer is fabricated from Viton™ and the outer layer is fabricated from Nitrile™.
- 6
- 7 7. The packer cup as described in claim 1 wherein the
8 intermediate layer is formed of multiple, biased interwoven layers of reinforcing
9 plies having upper and lower ends, the lower ends being fixed circumferentially to
10 the annular base ring.
- 11
- 12 8. The packer cup as described in claim 7 wherein the
13 reinforcing fibers are metal wire.
- 14
- 15 9. The packer cup as described in claim 7 wherein the
16 reinforcing fibers are aircraft cable.
- 17

1 10. An improved packer cup for a packer assembly, the cup
2 isolating a higher pressure zone from a lower pressure zone in the wellbore
3 casing wherein an inside of the cup is exposed to corrosive chemicals and
4 hydrocarbons and an outside to mechanical abrasion, the improvement
5 comprising:

- 6 - an annular base ring;
- 7 - an annular cup extending from the base ring and toward the
8 zone of higher pressure and having,
 - 9 an elastomeric chemically impervious inner layer, and
 - 10 an elastomeric abrasion resistant outer layer; and
 - 11 an annularly extending flexible interwoven fiber intermediate
12 layer, disposed between the inner and outer layers, and fixed at a lower end to
13 the base ring, the inner, outer and intermediate layers being bonded together to
14 form a unitary, flexible structure.

15
16 11. The packer cup as described in claim 10 wherein the inner
17 layer is fabricated from Viton™.

18
19 12. The packer cup of claim 10 wherein the outer layer is
20 fabricated from Nitrile™.

21
22 13. The packer cup as described in claim 10 wherein the inner
23 layer is fabricated from Viton™ and the outer layer is fabricated from Nitrile™.

24

-
- 1 14. The packer cup as described in claim 10 wherein the
2 reinforcing plies are metal cables.
3
- 4 15. The packer cup as described in claim 13 wherein the
5 reinforcing plies are metal cables.
6
- 7 16. A cup-type packer assembly for positioning in a wellbore
8 casing comprising:
9 a mandrel for positioning in the casing and forming an annulus
10 therebetween; and
11 at least one packer cup, each cup having an annular base ring
12 sealing engaged concentrically about the mandrel and an annular body for
13 sealing against the wellbore casing for isolating a zone of higher pressure from a
14 zone of lower pressure in the wellbore casing, the annular body comprising an
15 elastomeric inner layer, an elastomeric outer layer; and an annularly extending
16 flexible intermediate layer of interwoven reinforcing plies disposed between the
17 inner and outer layers, the plies being mounted at a lower end to the base ring,
18 the inner, outer and intermediate layers being bonded together to form a unitary,
19 flexible structure.
20

1 17. The cup-type packer assembly of claim 13 wherein the
2 packer is used for chemical stimulation at a zone in the wellbore casing and
3 wherein, for each cup:

4 the inner elastomeric layer is fabricated from a chemically
5 impervious elastomer; and

6 the outer layer is fabricated from an abrasion resistant elastomer.

7

8 18. The cup-type packer assembly of claim 16 further
9 comprising:

10 one or more uphole cups mounted at an uphole end of the mandrel,
11 each cup's annular body extending downhole from its base ring; and

12 one or more downhole cups mounted at a downhole end of the
13 mandrel, each cup's annular body extending uphole from its base ring, the uphole
14 and downhole cups' outer layers being resistant to abrasion during positioning of
15 the packer in the wellbore casing and the uphole and downhole cups' inner layers
16 being resistant to chemicals during higher pressure wellbore stimulation.

17

18 19. The packer cup as described in claim 16 wherein the inner
19 layer is fabricated from Viton™.

20

21 20. The packer cup of claim 16 wherein the outer layer is
22 fabricated from Nitrile™.

23

24 21. The packer cup as described in claim 16 wherein the inner
25 layer is fabricated from Viton™ and the outer layer is fabricated from Nitrile™.

1 22. The packer cup as described in claim 16 wherein the
2 reinforcing plies are metal cables.

3

4 23. The packer cup as described in claim 21 wherein the
5 reinforcing plies are metal cables.

24. An improved packer cup constructed and arranged
substantially as described in relation to Figs. 1 and 2 of the accompanying
drawings



Application No: GB 0225807.7
Claims searched: 1 to 23

16

Examiner: Richard So
Date of search: 27 February 2003

Patents Act 1977 : Search Report under Section 17

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Relevant to claims	Identity of document and passage or figure of particular relevance
A	-	US 4424865 A (PAYTON, Jr.). See whole document.
A	-	US 2723721 A (CORSETTE). See whole document in particular 1, 2, and 8 to 12, and column 2 lines 24 to 40.
A	-	US 2305282 A (TAYLOR et al.). See whole document in particular figures 1 and 2, page 1 lines 5 to 12.

Categories:

X Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
& Member of the same patent family	E Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.

Field of Search:

Search of GB, EP, WO & US patent documents classified in the following areas of the UKC^V:

E1F.

Worldwide search of patent documents classified in the following areas of the IPC⁷:

E21B.

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